The Top Runners' Quarterly

Newsletter of The Top Runners' Conference, The Official **Netrunner**® Players' Organization
Volume 10, Issue 1 All Four Quarters, 2006-2008
http://toprunners.freeservers.com; http://www.arasaka.de

Editorial

by Jens Kreutzer
<jens@arasaka.de>

There has been a rather long hiatus, and this new issue of the Top Runners' Quarterly will most likely come as a surprise to many. It has been three years since the last issue, and the "quarterly" part now is closer to meaning not "four times a year", but rather "once every fourth year". Still, I will keep the name, for recognition value and because "Top Runners Sporadically" doesn't cut it. As you might suspect, a full-time job plus two children tend to make short work of leisure time, but I have not given up on the TRQ.

Netrunner's tenth birthday in 2006 has come and gone without much fanfare, but despite many ups and downs (like the GatlingEngine episode or Zvi Mowshowitz's laudable efforts of reviving it), it is not on the way out by any means. Surprisingly—well, no: unsurprisingly, **Netrunner** still enjoys one of the best reputations among trading card games. I am referring to the website boardgame-geek.com, which offers an incredible wealth of information on all sorts of games, but also has a nice forum on **Netrunner**. Here is the direct link to the **Netrunner** page:

www.boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/1301

Boardgamegeek.com has a ranking system for games. Of 4642 ranked games at the moment, **Netrunner** is rank 149. But if you look solely at trading card games, only **Magic: The Gathering** (at 131) is ranked higher, even though **Netrunner** has been out of print for a little eternity while **Magic** is still a topseller! **Netrunner** really is that popular among connoisseurs.

You can also play **Netrunner** online now, on Malhavoc's Magic Workstation site, as you can read below. Good times.

Keep on running,
Yours,
Jens Kreutzer
(TRQ Editor)

Netrunner Online

by Malhavoc
<malhavoc@gmail.com>

Like many good things, it happened by chance.

I was once introduced to **Netrunner** by a friend at university and immediately liked the game. I had only this friend to play the game with, but since I was quite fond of **Magic: The Gathering** at the time and was getting into Magic Workstation (a program to play **Magic** online), I decided to try and modify Magic Workstation (MWS) in order to get a chance to play **Netrunner** online with other players.

At that time, I did not know of CCG Workshop, and even though it was partially shut down by Wizards of the Coast after a little while, I kept working on my project. I managed to get pictures for all cards, as well as spoilers; in a matter of some weeks, the first Game Pack for **Netrunner** under Windows was ready! And recently, people have managed to have MWS run on Linux, too!

MWS is in fact a general CCG engine, despite being designed mainly with **Magic** in mind: The developers simply created a program not tied to any particular game (or copyright!), leaving game packs on different sites and often in the hands of fans. During the years, packs for *Lord of the Rings*, *VS Systems*, and a few other games have been made. Maybe even the fact that there is no pay-per-play fee like it was with CCG Workshop helped this program survive through the years, together with the fact that everything is hosted in Russia. However, even if Wizards tried to shut it down, they would not really be able to stop it: The program allows P2P connections, and even the optional server can be downloaded and run by any single user, so once you have downloaded the program, there is nothing which prevents you from playing with it forever. And after all, if during all these years, Wizards have never stopped the **Magic** module, would they ever care enough about our beloved (but old) game to shoot it down?

To cut a long story short, after some time, I opened up www.runners-net.com, put all the download links and installation instructions on the site (the installation is not hard to do at all and takes very little time), and opened a forum and a java chat (#netrunner on SolidIRC).

After I had sent some messages around the Net, people started to come, and we managed to organize some tournaments. As the months came and went, people joined and left, too, as expected. Today, we have a handful of dedicated players who never would miss a tournament, some players who usually play isolated matches just for fun and sometimes join tournaments, and a number of weefles who come and join a tournament, play a round and just get flatlined to death, which makes them drop out of the tourney; fortunately, some of these weefles seem to survive the brain vulcanization and stay to play in further tournaments, too.

Recently, things have been running pretty smoothly: since most of the players have jobs, families, and such, we just give them the time needed to play, and usually it takes a couple of weeks at most to finish a round—this is quite nice, since it lets everyone play their favorite game without too much commitment. New players may have to wait a bit for the current tournament to finish (unless they want to make late entries resulting in lower scores), but since we do tournament after tournament, this is not so bad. Most new people, however, prefer to get in touch with the most experienced player and play a friendly single match first, either to understand the game better or to get used to the MWS game interface.

We have tried and are still playing many formats: Unlimited, 1/15, Sealed ... and it seems that the latter is the one preferred by most players. To make Sealed more easily played, I have developed the program NetSeal, which (based on a given seed) generates a MWS card pool for each player to pick cards from. And even though players have always been fair and nice, it

also supports encryption and hash mechanisms to ensure that people are going to play only with the cards they were given.

Tournaments are going well: We have two or three very good players who often make it to the finals, proving that **Netrunner** is not just a game of luck, and many others who have almost started to play "seriously" since the time I put up the site. Despite these differences in player expertise, the games are always very friendly, and people really enjoy them and learn more about the game.

In the most recent tournaments, we even tried to play with some of the so-called "Virtual Sets" (which I have entered into the MWS database): These are sets designed by famous **Netrunner** players over the years: Chrysalid Matrix by Skipper Pickle, Repeat Intrusion Patterns by Argi Flack, Dangerous Allies by Neal F. Guye, and Winterdawn. Some sets try to revisit old mechanisms like generic ice and generic icebreakers or Stealth, others come up with brand-new ones, such as Justice tokens. Playing with new sets is getting very exciting; it makes the game feel alive and causes a shifting metagame. Naturally, there are some needs for bans or errata for some new cards (and sometimes even for old cards which end up just being too powerful together with new ones). That is why we are taking our time with this and are still testing Chrysalid Matrix and Repeat Intrusion Patterns only.

In the end, I really cannot say that I am a very good player at all, but I like this game, and I am doing my best to keep it alive. The forum has become quite active (*much* more so than the old **Netrunner** mailing list these days), and sometimes we also talk about strategy in general, so it is not only about the tournaments. I am quite satisfied with the results we have achieved, even if finding some more players would really be nice! So, if you have not given it a try yet or you know someone who could be interested, have a look! And if you have any technical problems or need a test run, feel free to post to our forum, as we are eager to help newcomers.

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#21: The Great Wall

by Jens Kreutzer
<jens@arasaka.de>
with Michael Nock
and Daniel Schneider

"Has anyone tried a Great Wall of Chiba deck yet?"
—Dr. David Mar on the Netrunner-L, 20 May 1996.

Netrunner comes with three types of ice cards: code gates, walls, and sentries. A healthy mix with the focus on sentries is usually the way to go in order to make the Runner install all three types of icebreakers. In spite of this, specializing in one kind of ice and making use of supporting cards like Skälderviken SA Beta Test Site has always tickled Corp players' imaginations. While decks specializing in a subset of sentries (Black ice) have met with only very moderate success, the infamous Nasty Code Gate Deck has been very successful indeed. Of the trio, it's wall decks that never really got off the ground (despite the above quote from the infant days of **Netrunner**). But why?

There are two reasons. One: Walls don't have any "killer" support card like Encoder, Inc. to exploit. (Neither do Black ice sentries, but they in themselves tend to be dangerous for Runners, so this is not so big a problem—it's often enough to get them cheap). Two: There is this cheapo one-size-fits-all solution to walls named Pile Driver. For three bits—which is a steal—the Runner can be sure to break any wall in the game, even behemoths Wall of Ice and Toughonium Wall, which cost a whopping 13 bits to rez! Compare this to Liche, which for one bit more costs the Runner at least (with Big Frackin' Gun) six bits to break, barring random effects like AI Boon, and most sentry breakers won't do it under ten bits! Toughonium Wall's flavor text just seems to be a big joke: "It's so tough you can't even think about breaking it." Pile Driver eats it for breakfast, and since nobody really plays with stealth, the drawback of losing three stealth bits is negligible. There is of course Big Frackin' Gun, which does the same to sentries, but at double the price!

Thus, a wall deck (which will want to feature all of the "big" walls) will have its dreams shattered and rammed into the ground by Pile Driver, a breaker that shows up in many, many Runner decks. If all the wall-building efforts can so easily be faced down by the Runner, building a wall deck just doesn't seem worth it. But precisely because it must cope with strong opposition, building a wall deck against the odds is also a fun exercise which many Corp players have undergone. So let's see what we can come up with.

Here are the **Netrunner** cards that support walls and therefore fit the theme.

Superior Net Barriers (Agenda - Research) – Diff.: 6

```
All walls have +1 strength. When you score Superior Net Barriers, reveal as many walls as you wish. Then, gain one bit for each revealed or rezzed wall.
```

Data Masons (Node) – Rez cost: 1, Trash cost: 1

```
Cost to rez walls is reduced by 2. All walls have +1 strength.
```

Jerusalem City Grid (Upgrade - Region) –
Rez cost: 2, Trash cost: 5

```
Cost to rez walls on this fort is reduced by 2. All walls on this fort have +1 strength.
```

What these do is basically making walls cheaper to rez and raising their strength. Superior Net Barriers is a permanent strength boost, but is unbelievably difficult to score. Data Masons has a universal effect but is easily trashed, whereas Jerusalem City Grid provides the same effect for just one datafort, but is more expensive to trash. Unfortunately, we don't get an "adds an end-the-run subroutine" effect like with Encoder, Inc. to combine with Snowbank.

While Superior Net Barriers cannot be relied on to have a huge impact on the game (difficult to score, and you probably will only get one or two Barriers to have an effect since scoring a third usually ends the game), Data Masons and Jerusalem are straightforward: Include a couple of each, put a Masons or two into lightly protected subforts and a Jerusalem in R&D, perhaps another

one in HQ and in the agenda-scoring subfort—then start brick-laying. Soon, some nice and big walls will surround your forts.

Daniel Schneider built the following pre-*Classic* wall deck that tries to make use of all three wall support cards:

Pre-*Classic* Wall Deck
by Daniel Schneider

5	**Superior Net Barriers**
3	**Genetics-Visionary Acquisition**
6	**Data Masons**
5	**Jerusalem City Grid**
5	**BBS Whispering Campaign**
2	**Rescheduler**
2	**Project Consultants**
9	**Crystal Wall**
2	**Rock Is Strong**
2	**Galatea**
2	**Toughonium Wall**
2	**Shock.r**

Here are his comments on the deck (translated from the German): "The basic idea is of course rezzing almost all of the ice for free and making it tougher to boot. The goal is therefore to have at least two rezzed Data Masons in play. Data Masons is the most important card in the deck. Each Masons should be protected by one Crystal Wall. Since the deck has many must-includes cluttering up its card slots, BBS Whispering Campaign fits the bill as a bit engine that doesn't take up much room. Although most ice won't cost anything to rez if all goes well, you'll need quite some bits to get going, paying for thicker ice layers, rezzing nodes and fast advancement.

"Due to its expensive trash cost and its powerful effect, Jerusalem City Grid will be very strong in this deck. The agenda mix is ok, but not great. The Corp will try to score a Genetics-Visionary Acquisition as quickly as possible while the Runner 'looks the other way'. Then, the first Superior Net Barriers can be scored with Project Consultants, while the second one can perhaps be scored the slow way in a big-wall subfort (or with another Consultants). Should the few Project Consultants fail to show up in time, the Reschedulers can help find them.

"A different agenda mix of your standard 3/2 and 3/3 agendas not connected to the wall theme would certainly be stronger, since only one Superior Net Barriers is actually used for its effect. As the deck was designed before *Classic* came out, Glacier is absent from the deck list.

Glacier (Ice - Wall) – Rez cost: 0, Strength: 5

`Rezzing Glacier costs 1 agenda point, in addition to the normal cost.`
- `End the run.`
- `End the run.`

`❶: Move Glacier to the outermost position of any other data fort. Use this ability only at the start of a run. You may use this ability even if Glacier is unrezzed, in which case, you reveal it.`

"Glacier surely would be great to protect additional Data Masons, but in order to do this reliably, the Corp would have to be sure to always get the first agenda point quickly. Besides, 7 agenda points (1 Genetics plus 2 Net Barriers) won't be enough for the win anymore, and Glacier is costly in its own kind of way, since you need a bit each time you want to move it. Considering this, the deck would have to altered considerably to accommodate Glacier."

Crystal Wall (Ice - Wall) – Rez cost: 4, Strength: 3

- `End the run.`

Daniel probably chose Crystal Wall as his main piece of ice because it is the perfect match for the two cost reducers Data Masons and Jerusalem City Grid: Either two Masons in play or one Masons and a Jerusalem on the fort will reduce the rez cost of Crystal Wall to zero. It would also gain a strength of 5 or even 6 if a Superior Net Barriers has been scored. Not too shabby, but even at strength 6, Pile Driver still breaks it for 3 bits (while Rent-I-Con needs 5 bits and Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker as many as 7 bits).

Rock is Strong and Galatea, both with a rez cost of 6, are a logical extrapolation of this strategy: They rez for free with a Jerusalem and two Masons in play. A common safeguard for wall decks is including one or two code gates and sentries as well, just to "keep the Runner honest" and make him install a full breaker suite. Daniel settled for Shock.r (an inexpensive yet highly effective sentry) and Galatea, cleverly piggybacking Galatea's alter ego as a code gate on the cost-reducing effects that this piece of ice still gains due to its being a wall.

As a modification to Daniel's deck, you could take out the Reschedulers and substitute some more Project Consultants. This is a matter of personal style; Rescheduler might seem to be a waste of actions when you could be drawing Project Consultants instead, but Daniel is notorious for getting a lot of mileage out of this underappreciated node, as it also helps with an HQ cluttered up with agendas. Runners also usually do not bother to trash it.

Fine-tuning aside, Daniel's incarnation of a basic "Big Walls" deck serves as a good starting point for a more general discussion. In light of their weak support cards in comparison to code gates and their ubiquitous nemesis Pile Driver, walls almost seem to be the red-headed stepchild among the ice types of **Netrunner**. Code gates shut the Runner out on the cheap, whereas sentries have all the cool (read: deadly) effects on trespassers and are expensive to break. So who needs walls anyway? Aren't they just a more expensive way of saying "code gate", just to force the Runner to install another type of icebreaker? One could see that as a design flaw in **Netrunner**, but the truth is that walls do serve a very specific purpose in the game: They are the touchstone where all of the noisy/stealthy subgame happens. Barring exceptions like MS-todon, a Corp will need walls to make noisy Runners reveal themselves.

Unfortunately, this pivotal role of walls is downplayed by the overall weakness of the stealth strategy: Normally, the only downside to being noisy is the detrimental effect on stealth cards, but almost nobody plays them anyway. Rather than Cloak and its ilk, it is Library Search, Rush Hour and All-hands that make Runners consider using stealthy breakers like Worm at all these days—or, as the case may well be, using generic breakers like Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker in the first place. Rumor has it that the ill-fated *Silent Impact* expansion would have given the stealth

strategy a shot in the arm, thereby making the noisy issue a real issue again (and walls an integral part of the prudent Corp's defense line). But alas, we have to make do without it.

In order to make the "Big Walls" deck at least a little more viable, it is key to look at the various kinds of breakers that might oppose it. There are three possibilities (or four for the completist):

● Generic breakers like Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker and Rent-I-Con. These tend to show up a lot, but big walls are quite expensive for them to break, so the Corp player will be happy to see these two, Bartmoss in particular.

● Worms. The Corp already likes to see them because they are more expensive to install than noisy wallbreakers (and because they are not Pile Driver), but what is more, there is a deadly card in the Corp player's arsenal that spells death for them: Aardvark. It is probably worthwhile to include a couple of Aardvarks in a wall deck because it will absolutely cripple a Runner depending on worms. This is a reasonable metagame choice against Runner stacks that depend on Rush Hour, All-hands or Library Search for their multi-access.

● Noisy wallbreakers (usually, this means Pile Driver). Chances are that this spoilsport will rear its ugly hammerhead rather sooner than later. There is not much the Corp can do with the walls themselves to make it harder for Pile Driver, but *Classic* has given us another way of punishing noisy Runners: Sleepy ice (and London City Grid). These might give the Corp somewhat of a fighting chance.

● For the completist: There is also Japanese Water Torture. Have you ever wondered why this card is so expensive to install and so ridiculously expensive to actually use? (Yes, you have to forgo an action *and* pay a bit for each point of strength you want to give Water Torture in an encounter with a piece of ice.) The answer: It is neither a worm nor noisy, so it slips by both Aardvark and sleepy ice. But the Runner really has to pay through the nose for that, so the Corp will be happy indeed about a rare sighting of JWT.

In addition to fast-advancement cards, it would be wise to include another way of scoring agendas safely: Bizarre Encryption Scheme makes the Runner run the agenda fort twice, which can become prohibitively expensive with breakers like Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker. Because of all of this diversification, the deck cannot include more than two or four copies of key cards, and this makes Off-site Backups a useful tool for getting them back in a pinch. Michael Nock has looked at Daniel's decklist and tried to build an updated version that includes cards from *Classic* and implements the above thoughts (see right column).

This decklist is intended as a basic version. Let us think about some improvements. A wall deck has difficulties anyway in a competitive environment, so it should get the sleekest agenda mix possible to make up for it. Truth be told, it is counterproductive to include Superior Net Barriers on principle only because it fits the theme. The Corp will want to spend most bits on those big walls that have become affordable all of a sudden and not on the fast-advancement firepower necessary for Barriers. Still, should the Corp amass some surplus bits by scoring Political Coups or feel the need to end the game quickly, Management Shake-up does come in handy. So, keeping a Shake-up or three, we could throw out all Superior Net Barriers and substitute Marine Arcology, Corporate War or even Ice Transmutation for them if we want to stick closer to the core theme.

Post-*Classic* Wall Deck
by Michael Nock

3 Superior Net Barriers
3 Political Coup
1 Security Net Optimization
4 Data Masons
2 Jerusalem City Grid
2 London City Grid
2 Aardvark
2 Bizarre Encryption Scheme
4 BBS Whispering Campaign
3 Management Shake-up
3 Off-site Backups
4 Data Wall 2.0
2 Galatea
2 Glacier
1 Razor Wire
1 Shotgun Wire
1 Caryatid
1 Wall of Ice
1 Toughonium Wall
2 Deadeye
1 Imperial Guard

But before we start looking for power boosts, let us look at some permutations of this basic concept. Remaining true to the original idea, I have tried my own take on the Big Walls deck (see page 5). It is similar to Michael's deck, also making a point of using all three wall support cards Superior Net Barriers, Data Masons, and Jerusalem City Grid. However, in order to make good use of *Classic*'s sleepy ice to combat noisy breakers, I thought it imperative to include a way of rearranging the ice because sleepy ice always wants a wall in front of it. Herman Revista takes up too many slots, so I used this opportunity to showcase the two mobile walls from *Proteus*, Walking Wall and Mobile Barricade. These can move in front of Deadeye or Baskerville in a pinch.

As my fast-advancement option, I selected Chicago Branch. With an installed Chicago that survives one Runner turn, Corporate Downsizing and Marine Arcology can be scored out of HQ in a turn. Both yield some much-needed bits, as do Department of Truth Enhancement and Night Shift. Since Night Shift replaces itself by letting the Corp draw a card when played, it thins down the deck in a way and makes it a little easier to draw into the gimmick cards like Aardvark, of which there are only two copies in most cases. As an alternative to Chicago Branch, you might want to give Vapor Ops a try.

The ice selection lets rarely-encountered walls like Reinforced Wall see some action, but this can be altered to taste. It is debatable whether including walls that do Net damage is a good idea; I tend to see them as a nice surprise that might catch a Runner unawares, but other players say that giving the Runner options is always a bad thing. If the Runner has enough cards in hand to weather the Net damage, he or she can choose whether to spend the bits to break the routine or not while (presumably) still getting the agenda. Two "end the run" subroutines, on the other hand, are either broken or else.

Post-*Classic* Wall Deck
by Jens Kreutzer

3 Superior Net Barriers
3 Corporate Downsizing
2 Marine Arcology
4 Data Masons
2 Jerusalem City Grid
2 London City Grid
2 Aardvark
2 Chicago Branch
4 Department of Truth Enhancement
4 Night Shift
3 Walking Wall
2 Mobile Barricade
1 Razor Wire
2 Reinforced Wall
2 Shotgun Wire
1 Wall of Ice
1 Toughonium Wall
1 Mazer
2 Deadeye
2 Baskerville

Neither Michael nor I uses a lot of Jerusalem City Grids anymore; the reason is that Jerusalem cannot share a datafort with London City Grid. In the end, I chose Mazer over Galatea/Caryatid because it costs 3 bits more to get one of these wall-spawned code gates rezzed than their counterparts Keeper/Mazer, which means that they do not even start to get cheaper before you have two cost reducers in play. With only 6 of them in the deck, I would rather not take any chances.

While sleepy ice is a nice vendetta against those pesky Pile Drivers, it still does not solve the problem that Pile Driver breaks walls so frustratingly cheaply. London City Grid is really a case in point here: It is really nice versus all noisy icebreakers *except* Pile Driver:

London City Grid (Upgrade - Region) – Rez cost: 3, Trash cost: 6

Runner must pay ❶, in addition to the normal cost, to use each subroutine of a noisy icebreaker during runs on this fort.

Pile Driver (Program – Icebreaker – Noisy – 1 MU) – Cost: 1, Strength: 7

❸: Break up to four wall subroutines on a single piece of ice.
❶: +1 strength
Whenever you use Pile Driver's break-walls subroutine, lose a total of ❸ from stealth cards.

Because Pile Driver already has a strength of 7, rare is the case when it uses any other subroutine than the first (though Toughonium Wall benefits nicely from the strength increase Data Masons and Jerusalem provide). This means that the only effect London City Grid will usually have on Pile Driver is raising the cost to break a wall from 3 to 4 bits. If there are not 4 walls on a London City Grid fort already, you might as well install another wall to make Pile Driver spend 3 more bits. Therefore, Jerusalem City Grid might actually be better versus Pile Driver than London City Grid, although you still must figure in the installation costs.

So how can the Corp really hurt Pile Driver? London City Grid wants Pile Driver to use its second subroutine more often. This means walls with high strength and brings *Classic*'s Sterdroid to mind. Rock Is Strong plus London City Grid plus Sterdroid would cost Pile Driver 10 bits to break (as opposed to 4 bits without Sterdroid but with London City Grid)—not too bad as a result. But Sterdroid costs 3 bits to activate, so it is really only a net gain of 3 bits for the Corp, which is not a lot for jumping through so many hoops. What is more, Sterdroid is trashed after activation, so the Corp will not be able to pull this off very often. Critically, Sterdroid tops off at strength 10, which means that flagships Wall of Ice and Toughonium Wall won't even get the maximum mileage out of Sterdroid. Therefore, as things are, I don't feel that this upgrade is the way to go in a wall deck.

Are there any options left? A Runner with the handle *whodack* recently wrote the following comment on a BBS: "The only good thing against Pile Driver is Data Walls and walls with five subroutines … which only Sandstorm and Iceberg qualify for (kinda)." Data Walls would let us stray too far away from the "Big Walls" theme, but the other two walls are worth some thoughts.

Iceberg (Ice - Wall) – Rez cost: 4, Strength: 4

➤ Do 1 Net damage.
➤ ❷: Iceberg has one "➤ End the run" subroutine for the present encounter. Use this ability only when Runner encounters Iceberg.

Sandstorm (Ice - Wall) – Rez cost: 4, Strength: 4

Sandstorm has one "➤ End the run" subroutine for every ❷ you pay, above the rez cost, when you rez it.

Iceberg must be paid for each time it is encountered, so paying 10 bits (or 8 if you count the Net damage subroutine) to make Pile Driver spend 3 more bits is out of the question. That leaves us with Sandstorm. To give it five subroutines, the Corp must pay 10 bits as well, but if the Runner runs that fort twice, the Corp starts to come out ahead in the bit race as it is 6 bits each time for Pile Driver. Mind you, all of this does not figure in the rez cost of 4 that must still be paid—paid hopefully by Data Masons or Jerusalem if this plan is supposed to get anywhere economically.

A nice match for Sandstorm is an underused agenda: Data Fort Reclamation. You get ten bits to spend on a new datafort, and these *can* be used to pay for Sandstorm's extra-subroutines ability. With two Data Masons in play, Data Fort Reclamation lets you rez a monster Sandstorm for free! If the Corp tops it off with an Ice Transmutation thereafter, Pile Driver would have to face ten subroutines and spend 9 bits a pop (while other wallbreakers would be in the same ballpark). Note that this deck has 50 cards (see top of page 6).

Well, coming to a close: What is the verdict on big walls as a deck idea? Unless your metagame has the majority of Runners playing with Worms and Rush Hour/All-hands/Library Search, I would stay away from this concept in a competitive environment. From the three ice types code gates, walls, and sentries, walls

probably are the weakest as a basis for a deck. Still, since there are a number of support cards, it is definitely a fun decktype to try out in a casual environment. Just hope you don't have to face Pile Driver all that often!

Anti-Pile Driver Wall Deck With Sandstorm
by Jens Kreutzer

4	**Data Fort Reclamation**
4	**Ice Transmutation**
6	**Data Masons**
3	**London City Grid**
2	**Aardvark**
4	**Bizarre Encryption Scheme**
2	**Management Shake-Up**
6	**BBS Whispering Campaign**
4	**Data Wall 2.0**
6	**Sandstorm**
1	**Toughonium Wall**
4	**Deadeye**
2	**Imperial Guard**
2	**Quandary**

After all of this desperation and resignation because of Pile Driver, this article should finish on a more light-hearted note. One more card that supports walls has not been mentioned so far: *Proteus*'s Minotaur.

Minotaur (Ice – Sentry) – Rez cost: 6, Strength: 4

```
For each rezzed code gate or wall installed outside Minotaur, Minotaur has one "➢ End the run" subroutine.
```

This is not a "pure" walls card since it supports code gates as well (and arguably better). Is it worthwhile to include it in a wall deck regardless? Minotaur is comparable to π in the 'Face:

π in the 'Face (Ice – Sentry) – Rez cost: 5, Strength: 3

```
➢ End the run.
```

Minotaur has a rez cost of 6 (one more than π in the 'Face), but its strength is one point higher, too. So if we assume that Minotaur gets one subroutine, it is not more expensive than π in the 'Face, getting better as soon as there are two walls outside of it. In a wall deck, that is a pretty good deal, as we can assume that it is feasible to install Minotaur with at least one wall to support it. That means that it is all right to include Minotaur in about any wall deck. Of course, to make Minotaur really shine, the Corp wants *lots* of ice outside of it. To pull this off, the Corp player would need cheap ice and some infrastructure along the lines of Chester Mix to enable a truly big data fort. All of this points into the direction of a code gate deck—preferably one with payback ice. The step to Encoder, Inc. and the Nasty Code Gate deck is a small one.

A deck that uses Minotaur to its full potential and stays true to the "big walls" theme of this article won't work. Maybe Snowbank and some other cheaper walls that rez for free with a couple of Data Masons could pull it off, but I do not want to stray too far from the "Great Wall" topic. Still, here is a theme deck for your enjoyment that portrays lots of walls forming the labyrinth in which the Minotaur dwells. Bring on ancient Greece!

Con-Crete Walls
(Minotaur Theme Deck)
by Jens Kreutzer

4	**Marine Arcology**
5	**Political Coup**
4	**Data Masons**
3	**Trojan Horse**
3	**Scorched Earth**
1	**Siren**
1	**Chimera**
1	**New Blood**
4	**BBS Whispering Campaign**
6	**Minotaur**
1	**Cerberus**
4	**Data Wall**
4	**Crystal Wall**
1	**Galatea**
1	**Caryatid**
1	**Nerve Labyrinth**
1	**Mazer**

I chose a mixture of walls that do not look too futuristic to go with the theme. The agendas reflect the Mediterranean Sea and the political decision of Athens to send tribute to the island of Crete (including human food for the Minotaur, i. e. new blood!). For reasons of flavor, Trojan Horse is a must-include, so this deck needs a way to make use of tags, which I chose to be Scorched Earth (as Troy was burnt and razed to the ground). As for the rest: well, Siren, Chimera and Cerberus aren't a perfect fit strategically, but they just had to show up as prominent members of the ancient Greek bestiary. They might be good for a nice surpise, though. Data Masons and BBS Whispering Campaign, on the other hand, do not fit the flavor theme that well, but they are necessary for the "walls" part and plain old bits to pay for it all, respectively. Perhaps you can think of the Masons as Daedalus and Icarus (who built the labyrinth), and the Campaign might be Ariadne whispering into Theseus's ears how to survive the labyrinth.

Did You Know?
Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection
#21: Rache Bartmoss

by Jens Kreutzer
<jens@arasaka.de>

"Rache Bartmoss, the World's Greatest Netrunner, is dead!" Well, that explains why there is a Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker. But who is (or rather, was) that guy anyway? The quote cited above comes from R. Talsorian's *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net*, and we need look no further for the answer.

In the introduction (p. 2), David Ackermann gives us some more information: "We know you're going to find Rache's unique perspective entertaining, but do keep in mind that Rache is, amongst other things, a borderline sociopath, a certified (if brilliant) paranoid, and a generally rude and vicious individual. His opinions of people and places around the world are almost

uniformly negative, and he isn't afraid to scream them at anyone who'll listen. So if any of you are offended by some of Rache's tirades, keep this in mind: Rache is now a frozen piece of near-dead meat sitting alone in an isolated life-support chamber buried in a cellar somewhere."

His opinions can be found on **Netrunner** cards, too: Here is a list of all Bartmoss quotes as found in the flavor texts, interspersed with some comments on his character. Let's start off with some quotes that show how knowledgeable Rache is about the Net:

Hunt Club BBS

"The Hunt Club got its name from the original programmers, who were self-described 'hunters,' corporate programmers who moonlighted as freelance counter-intrusion agents."

This goes so far that he shows only contempt for people who are not at home there:

Skullcap

"Just the superficial sort of icon that someone grounded too far in 'reality' would think up. TURN UP THE FEED, YOU WIGGLY MEAT THINGS! THIS IS THE NET! NOTHING'S REAL! YOU HAVE NO HEAD!"

His experience allows him to defy danger and even get his own kind of use out of obstacles meant to stop him:

Nerve Labyrinth

"If you're authorized, it's a smooth ride through; if you're not, you get the brain-twist of someone else's idea of normalcy." –Spider Murphy

"But it's a great training ground for navigating wilder-space." –Rache Bartmoss

Spider Murphy is a close associate of Rache's. We'll hear more from her below. There are two quotes that illustrate Bartmoss's twisted sense of humor:

Force Shield

"Never use 'em; don't need 'em. My brain's been smoked so much that my myelin's vulcanized. That's why my ears are always dirty."

Self-Modifying Code

"Now, if I just could do this with my DNA … on the fly … while eating."

Living dangerously and trying to remain the cutting edge have taken their toll on Bartmoss's psyche. He is probably experiencing hallucinations (or has "become one with the Matrix"?):

Romp through HQ

"I love the sound of screaming crystal. Sadly, I seem to be the only one to hear it."

Years and years of battling deadly corporate ice have made him somewhat of a disillusioned cynic, too:

misc.for-sale

"Why throw it away when you can convince some half-brained weef to use it for creative suicide instead?"

The last quote tells a story of his living on the run as a hunted individual and hints at Rache's ultimate fate:

Armored Fridge

"I also once shut off the hot-water line to my dishwasher and hid in there while it was running, but I'll never do that again."

That time, hiding in the dishwasher may have saved his life, but one day, a piece of black ice must have got the better of him. Spider Murphy speaks about that in *Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net* (p. 4-6):

"Rache Bartmoss got tagged. I don't know who or how. He won't talk about the incident. But Rache, damn him, is a survivor, and now he's paying the price.

"But I digress. Before I tell you of his death, I should tell you of his life.

"Rache Bartmoss is perhaps the only 'runner I ever met who used his real name (that's right, folks, Spider Murphy is a *nom d'electrique*). I know this, because my father was the one who wiped his SIN [State Identification Number] off the system. He told his bottle about it that night while he sat in a drunken stupor; I chanced to overhear. As it happened, I had heard of Rache Bartmoss on the street, so when Dear Old Dad the Corporate Puppet killed his SIN, I tracked him down to warn him.

"When I finally found Bartmoss, I was surprised. He was seventeen, and but for the acne, he looked more like twenty-five. He'd been running the Net for thirteen years (!), and had a full set of high-quality 'trodes and a library of software the likes of which I'd never seen. I was thirteen at the time, running the Net for four years, but in the first ten minutes I knew that Rache's skills were of a different order of magnitude. I knew then that he had a long career ahead of him, because even when he lost his reflexes, his experience and his uncanny sixth sense would keep him on the edge.

"I think Rache first used his real name because, when he was four or five, he didn't know any better. By the time he knew it was a stupid move, he was good enough that it didn't matter. He stuck with it as a conceit, a way to flaunt his skill at the megacorps and Netwatch creeps. He gave them his name, for goodness' sake, and they still couldn't catch him.

"Rache also experimented with everything. For a while he even went legit, writing software. He worked with some of the best companies, always using his real name. As I understand it, the companies took him under the proviso that he wouldn't run against their own systems. Knowing Rache, he promised, with full intent not to double-cross his employers or go snooping around their closets. And, knowing Rache, his promise lasted for about two weeks. I noticed that there were occasional serious breaches of security wherever he worked, starting about a month after he signed

on. Another two months, and the corps would finally figure out he was raping their systems in the name of his peculiar brand of justice, and he'd have to disappear. He always knew when he'd been found out, and made good his escape in good time. I put him up more than once, but when I did I made sure I had my phone service cut off.

"After the dust settled, he'd manage to clean his record after a few runs and hire on somewhere else.

"Once he worked for a year at a smaller firm, CCI Development, which didn't have any skeletons in the closet. Things worked fine, and the company came out with some innovative new products, including the Demon series and a powerful new database system. Unfortunately, Bartmoss dropped a few surprises into the database code, including a full-blown 'political' movie. When word got back to the company, they fired him. Within a week, their entire computer system had fried its own brains, and the company went belly-up. Rache himself sold the source code to the demon programs to several software houses simultaneously and made enough money that he never had to work again. Of course, each publisher thought they were getting exclusive rights, so they all wanted his scalp, too. They just didn't understand that Rache doesn't believe in exclusive rights.

"Rache Bartmoss is the wild card of the Net. To my knowledge, he never took any drugs, but with all the wiring inside his skull, I'm sure it messed with his mind somewhat. He tried every single interface that I ever heard of. It's a wonder he didn't go psycho on us. My guess is that he had a special sense for the Net, an instinctive understanding, and that the wires in his head therefore seemed natural to him, hooking him up to the Net as they did.

"Rache Bartmoss is, without a doubt, the best netrunner I have ever encountered. He could almost be called a wizard. He achieved this partly through a very Net-oriented perspective of life and reality. To him, the Net was the real world. Rache has never believed in borders, discrimination, travel restrictions, secrets, conventions, rules, or anything inhibiting free and total communication. Intrinsically, that's exactly what the Net is like. The Net itself allows anything, and it's only the megacorps and Netwatch that make the Net a dangerous place, and for these sins Rache Bartmoss became the self-sworn avenger of the Net. I tried to explain once that Netwatch was there specifically to stop people like him, but he truly couldn't understand why anyone would think that someone like him should be stopped.

"Sadly, folks, he did get stopped. Rache Bartmoss, somehow, had his heart stopped. Maybe he got careless, although Rache was nothing if not paranoid. Personally, I think it was sheer bad luck, coincidence of cosmic proportions. It's possible it was even something as simple as heart failure. Any number of Black ice programs could have done this to Rache, although it was probably a combination of several (Rache could have handled just one or two, no sweat). Then again, it may have simply been adrenal overload. Such is life on the Edge …

"But, since Rache ran the Net for days at a time (and all at light speed), he still manages to survive. He's out there now, still hooked in to the Net. His life-support machines, sensing that his heart had stopped, cooled him down to prevent decay. Super-cooled him, in fact. Rache took a lot of precautions with his meat body to ensure its safety. He also had a lot of money to take precautions with.

"Apparently Rache forgot to tell anyone to get his body should he be killed, because he's been in cold storage for the last year. In his cryogenic condition, his brain is able to continue to operate at slow speeds, super-cooled hydrogen conductivity and other science too close to the Edge for my understanding. He's out there, somewhere, folks, a frost-covered chunk of frozen meat, his brain permanently hooked into the Net.

"Over the last ten months, a constant slow stream of data has been trickling into a buffer on my system as Rache's sluggish brain dictates his life's memoires before the power company shuts his system off and he fades into a stinking death wherever he is. I've even been able to talk with him, using a specially adapted modem with a slow transmit speed, but as he has been most concerned with completing this guide, I've kept my questions to a minimum.

"Rache knows he's dead. Since his body is no longer working, his cyberdeck has ceased its sensory editing functions, and every so often Rache's manuscript is interrupted by a complaint about his situation. He knows he's dead, the premier 'runner of our age, and that simple fact, my friends, is why he wanted to release this guide …

"He knows what it's like; and he's trying to save us from it."

Rache Bartmoss' Guide to the Net has copious information on the world of *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, the roleplaying game by R. Talsorian Games that lent **Netrunner** its background. It is a good read, and though you'd be hard-pressed to find the actual book, you can still buy it as a PDF scan at www.drivethrough.com these days.

As a footnote, I would like to mention that **Netrunner** has a number of concepts and cards that hint at Rache Bartmoss's story. Bodyweight Data Creche lets the Runner run for days on end without jacking out, which reminds me of Rache's state of cryogenic suspended animation. Lucidrine Drip Feed also pokes fun at living online exclusively for an extended period of time and finally realizing that the girlfriend is gone and the dog dead. Emergency Self-Construct, on the other hand, could well reflect what Rache has become.

TRC Administrative Personnel